

President's Corner
CSJ President's Message

As we draw close to another New York State annual convention, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the CSJ Executive Council, Executive Board, District Chairpersons and local lodge liaisons, all of whom have given of their time and energy to help make the CSJ a very viable part of OSIA. I particularly would like to thank Carmine Federico, our NYS Corresponding Secretary for his assistance with our CSJ Liaisons in District VII and Joseph Berta, State Trustee, for his assistance in District VIII. We need a CSJ Liaison Chairperson in District VII. The only requirement is an interest in fighting bias and bigotry against Italian Americans - promoting our positive image and a few hours of time during the month.

Mille grazie to all those who attended or supported our February fund raiser. Our brunch/dinner was a huge success with over 200 members and friends in attendance. Both our honorees, Carlo Sclafani and Bob Spiotta were deeply honored by the recognition. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Josephine Morici Cohen, Dinner Chairperson, Sylvia Summa, Journal Chairperson, Josephine Truglio, Raffle Chairperson and the entire dinner dance committee, all of who contributed to the success of this event. I particularly commend Josephine Cohen, Dinner Chairperson, who always makes this task look magically simple.

I was recently visited by our Holocaust Committee Chairperson, Vincent Marmorale, who brought me a copy of a recently published book entitled, "It Happened In Italy." Vincent was quite instrumental in collaborating with the author, Elizabeth Bettina. The book features *untold stories of how the people of Italy defied the horrors of the Holocaust*. It contains many of Walter Wolff's artifacts and recounts his experiences. There is also an entire chapter devoted to Vincent Marmorale. More information will be available at our convention display table.

We recently circulated a flyer concerning a nationally aired advertisement by Denny's Restaurant chain for their "*Serious Breakfast*." The ad depicted three obvious "Mafia characters" planning a mob hit to eliminate "Benny," while a waitress sprayed a whipped cream *smiley face* on their pancakes. Letters were sent to the President and CEO of Denny's, who is Italian, complaining about this advertisement. He responded by saying that he thought it was funny and entertaining. Other Italian American organizations joined with us with their protests. I am happy to report that the objectionable portion of this ad was removed from the air.

Several weeks ago, Curtis Sliwa embarked on a tirade, during one of his radio programs, which is aired nationally, about the earmarking of the stimulus money that was being disbursed by the federal government. He particularly pointed out that the Italian American Museum received a portion of this money and then went on to make some very derogatory remarks relating the museum to the Mafia. We were contacted by National CSJ and other Italian American Organizations concerning this outrage. Letters were sent to Curtis and ABC News regarding the matter. I also contacted Dr. Joseph Scelsa, Director of the Italian American Museum and offered our support on this issue. Together with other Italian American Organizations, Dr. Scelsa and IA Museum Board of Directors, we met with Curtis Sliwa, ABC representatives on March 30th at the Museum. Ronald Mannino, a museum board member, introduced our concerns and issues with Sliwa's broadcast. Sliwa then addressed the group at length, beginning with the fact that his mother is an Italian American. He further indicated that the initial theme of his broadcast that night was the stimulus package issue and what groups were earmarked to receive benefits from this package. It was his understanding that monies were to go only to companies to generate jobs and employment. It was his opinion that no museum, other than the Smithsonian, should benefit from stimulus money. He admitted that he unfortunately got "carried away" during the program and should not have targeted the museum or associated it with organized crime. He apologized, agreed to speak about the matter on the air as well as point out positive contributions of Italian-Americans. The

meeting was followed up with a letter of apology. We believe that he will curtail his derogatory remarks towards Italian Americans in the future.

The faculty of the Brown University voted to establish a new academic and administrative holiday in October called "Fall Weekend" that will coincide with Columbus Day, but that doesn't bear the name of the explorer. Hundreds of Brown students had asked the Providence, R.I. school to stop observing Columbus Day, saying Christopher Columbus's violent treatment of Native Americans he encountered was inconsistent with Brown's values. The change will take effect this fall. We believe that this decision on the part of these students is the result of the elimination of teaching about the accomplishments of Columbus, and the new teaching concept that Columbus did not discover America, because it was already inhabited and that he was responsible for slavery and other maladies suffered by Native Americans. This matter was addressed by the National CSJ President, and the Grand Lodge in Rhode Island. We offered our support on the issue. What can be done about this situation? We must continue in our efforts to bring the positive image of Columbus back into the textbooks, commencing at the elementary school level.

Invitations were sent regarding our 28th NYS CSJ – B'nai B'rith Breakfast of Solidarity, will be held on **Sunday, May 31, 2009 at 930 AM at Verdi's on Old Country Road, Westbury, NY.** Lehman-LaGuardia Awards, will be presented to Rabbi Steven Moss, Chairman, Suffolk County Human Rights Division and Flaminia Lubin, Film Producer and Director, her latest documentary being "50 Italians who saved Jews during the Holocaust." We look forward to seeing you all there.

Please visit the CSJ table at the NY State annual convention in June. We look forward to meeting with you and discussing any issues that may be of concern to you.

Remember - if you are a member of the Order, you are a member of the CSJ! Also if you see or hear something-- say something! We cannot act on an issue, if we do not know about it!!

Fraternally,

Stella Grillo
NYS CSJ President